



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

is of course highly Calvinistic; but even those who may not adopt all the author's theological views will find much in it to quicken their better feelings, and to aid their spiritual growth.

5. — *The Life and Works of Goethe, with Sketches of his Age and Contemporaries, from published and unpublished Sources.* By G. H. LEWES, Author of "The Biographical History of Philosophy," etc. In two volumes. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1856. 12mo. pp. 435, 478.

It is quite remarkable that the earliest complete biography of Goethe, as of Schiller, should have been undertaken by an Englishman. The first undertaken was not in this instance, however, the first accomplished. Those of Viehoff and of Schäfer have both appeared during the ten years that have elapsed since Mr. Lewes, who has thus more than satisfied the Horatian precept, announced his design. So wide an interval between inception and completion affords a fair presumption of thoroughness in any literary work to which the writer thereof is otherwise competent. This presumption is verified, we think, in these volumes of Mr. Lewes, who brings to his task the important qualifications of a more than ordinary acquaintance with the German language and literature, of philosophic candor, patient investigation, and conscientious fidelity. If with these excellences there mingles something of that national self-complacency which Englishmen are apt to manifest in discussing foreign writers, as also an occasional petulance of criticism, these defects do not impair the substantial merits of the biography.

In his *Biographical History of Philosophy*, the author claims a special value for that work on the somewhat questionable ground of unbelief in the subject, that is, in the possibility of philosophy. "The leading feature of this work," he says, "is one which distinguishes it from all others on the subject: the peculiarity of being a History of Philosophy by one who firmly believes that philosophy is an impossible attempt." The value of the present undertaking has a very different basis. There is no distrust of the subject. The biographer believes in his hero. He believes in his greatness, he believes in his goodness; and this faith is very essential to the right performance of such a work. No true biography can be written in any other spirit than that of hearty confidence in the subject.

Nevertheless Mr. Lewes is no blind worshipper. He does not turn biography into panegyric. Limitations and defects he clearly discerns, and freely admits. So far from idolizing his hero, he does not even

idealize him ; and in some of his criticisms he has seemed to us less than just.

Goethe is distinguished from most literary heroes by the many-sidedness of his genius and the wide diversity of his achievements. Other writers have excelled in different departments. There have been poets who were also men of science, as Lucretius, Haller, and Darwin. There have been poets who were also novelists, as Voltaire and Scott. There have been lyric poets who were also dramatists, as Byron and Schiller. Goethe alone has been great in all these kinds. Science owes to him the most fruitful ideas of modern time on the subject of morphology. As a novelist, he produced at the age of twenty-five the most successful fiction of that day, and afterwards produced the most profound. As a dramatist, not to speak of *Iphigenia* and *Tasso*, and a host of minor productions, he has enriched the world with the greatest composition since *Hamlet*, — *Faust*. As a lyricist, he stands confessedly at the head of all who have ever attained to eminence in that direction.

It is evident that a critical biography of one whose genius embraced so vast a range of endeavor must require in the biographer extensive culture and uncommon critical ability. Of these Mr. Lewes has given ample evidence. His views do not always coincide with our own, but we rate his expositions of Goethe's works as among the best that have yet appeared ; certainly the best from any English pen.

But what a life it is which these pages unfold ! For long-continued productiveness in the highest walks of art, it has scarcely a parallel. When we consider that the youthful essay by which Goethe first became known, and by which he attained at once a European reputation, — "*The Sorrows of Werther*," — was published six or seven years before Dr. Johnson had completed his most celebrated work, "*The Lives of the Poets*," and a quarter of a century before the maiden verses of Walter Scott gave doubtful promise of the future "*Wizard of the North*" ; and that his latest, and, as some think, his greatest production, the *Second Part of Faust*, was not finished till fifty years after Johnson's death, and not till Scott had completed his long and distinguished career ; — when we consider this, we have a cycle of intellectual activity almost unexampled in the annals of literature, — a term of labor which spans the most momentous epoch of modern history, and embraces the greatest revolutions in human thought and human life.

A considerable portion of Goethe's poetical compositions are dramatic in form ; but Mr. Lewes denies him genuine dramatic talent.

"It was a peculiarity in Goethe's mind to attach itself to *Character* and

Picture, and to remain indifferent to *Action* or *Event*. In a story he cared nothing for the circumstance; all he asked was a delineation of human nature to satisfy his intellect, and a skilful picture of objects to satisfy his artistic sense. Human nature had more of a psychological than of a passionate attraction for him, the very passions themselves being interesting to him as problems rather than as emotions. Herein lay the cause of the singular absence in him both of historic feeling and of *dramatic power*." — Vol. I. p. 158.

This criticism, so far as we are aware, is new, and it seems to us singularly just, if we use the word *dramatic* in Mr. Lewes's sense, as nearly synonymous with scenic. That Goethe's dramas are unfit for the stage is notorious. They are seldom, if ever, seen upon the boards. Even *Egmont*, the most available, is no favorite with actors; while *Wilhelm Tell*, *The Maid of Orleans*, and *The Robbers* are stock plays in all the theatres of Germany. The reason assigned by Mr. Lewes is unquestionably the principal one. But we must be careful to distinguish between a drama and a play. Considered as plays adapted to the stage, those of Goethe are inferior to those of Schiller. But while as poems they are superior, they are also so far dramatic that the different characters are not, as in a novel or an epic, incidental to one central personage, but develop themselves independently from a common ground. They are dramatic, inasmuch as that form in each of them is not an arbitrary, but a necessary treatment of the theme, a constitutive feature in the first conception of it, and could not be changed without sacrificing the essential worth of the piece. In this respect they are like Milton's *Comus*, which is never performed, and is wholly unfit for the stage, and yet is truly, and to the innermost core, dramatic, and could not be cast into any other mould without losing its essential beauty. The same may be said of the *Book of Job*.

Another reason why Goethe did not succeed in works for the stage is, that he never really wrote for the stage as it then was, or ever has been, or (as he well knew) is ever likely to be. He could never bring himself to write for effect. Herein especially he differs from Schiller, with whom stage effect was always a prime object, until the influence of his great contemporary gave his genius a more artistic direction. Whoso writes for the stage must of course have regard to stage effect. The greatest dramatists have done so, and none more than Shakespeare. But Goethe, we repeat, did not write his dramas for the stage; that is to say, the stage was not his foremost aim. He addressed himself to an imaginary audience of artists, and so failed of popular effect. Possibly, if *Egmont* and *Tasso* had been written while the author was director of the Weimar theatre, they would have exhibited more of what Mr. Lewes calls "*dramatic power*."

Our biographer says little of one of Goethe's most remarkable works, the Autobiography, and that little is said disparagingly. He seems to regard this delightful narrative as the unsuccessful attempt of an old man to reproduce the scenes of his youth. Where the story varies in tone, or color, or the order of events, from the testimony of contemporary witnesses, Mr. Lewes regards such variations as imperfect reminiscences, and cautions the reader against them.* No doubt, the autobiography departs occasionally, in matters of minor importance, from the true historic order. But to speak of these discrepancies as "inaccuracies," is to misapprehend the design of that work, which is not to furnish an exact record, but a lifelike picture. The literary artist so predominated in Goethe, that he could not "for the life of him" treat his own life otherwise than artistically. It is not for precise information, but for philosophic instruction and artistic enjoyment, that we are to read the book. It is not a daguerreotype, but a painting, which after all, if well done, is not only the pleasantest picture, but (what seems paradoxical) the truest portrait. The title *Dichtung und Wahrheit* might, one would think, have enlightened Mr. Lewes on this point.

We can by no means agree with the biographer in his estimate of the Second Part of Faust, which he considers a failure. We confess ourselves of the number of those "admirers" who view it as "a work of transcendent merit." At the same time, we honor the frankness with which he discusses a production so highly esteemed by native critics. We cannot but think that future readings and further experience will bring him round to be of their mind. Of the First Part he writes enthusiastically, and yet with discrimination. We commend his analysis of this wondrous poem as one of the best that have met our eye. One curious mistake, however, we must notice in passing. In that wild scene where Faust and Mephistopheles are rushing at night on their charmed steeds across the moor to the rescue of Margaret, and see a vision of goblins as they pass by the gallows, Mr. Lewes tells us that "the sound of carpenters at work on the gibbet informs them of the preparations for the execution of Margaret." Where, in all the world, did he pick up this piece of information? There is not the slightest hint of any such thing in the poem,—no carpenter heard, or seen, or dreamed of, except by Mr. Lewes.

The book has for its motto a tribute of Jung Stelling to "Goethe's heart." It aims, among other things, to place the moral nature of the poet in a clearer light. It was well to do this, and we thank the

* See Vol. I. p. 53.

author for it; but we have little hope that the false and foolish impressions concerning him, as a selfish and heartless monster, will be dissipated in this generation. Strange it is, there are no judgments which we are so unwilling to have disturbed as those which wrong our fellow-men. But the time must come when the greatest poet of his age will be judged no longer by court gossip and the misrepresentations of party spite, but by his works. And when so judged he will assuredly — even as a moral nature — be esteemed “very highly for his works’ sake.”

6. — *Felicità: a Metrical Romance.* By ELIZABETH C. KINNEY.
New York: James S. Dickerson. 1855. 24mo. pp. 188.

BEFORE the appearance of this poem Mrs. Kinney had secured an enviable position among the female writers of the country. Her productions had borne the impress of a vigorous intellect and superior powers of conception and expression. In Southern Italy, where she has of late resided, she became possessed of a story in some of its features so extraordinary as to approach the incredible, but serving to confirm the ancient and undeniable adage, that “truth is stranger than fiction.” She has chosen to entitle the tale founded on these marvellous facts “a metrical romance”; for around the narrative she has woven a web of her own, on which she has lavished the richness of her fancy, and expended the resources for illustration which she had treasured up in her reading and her travel.

The opening scene is in a convent in Italy, and

“ Now the holy vespers cease :
Twilight’s curtain is descending, —
Day’s tumultuous rule is ending
In the gentler reign of peace :
To their cells the nuns repair,
Each to sleepy tasks of prayer ;
All to count their beads ; save one
Who gives thanks that she ’s alone ;
For she hath too little share
In what makes the others’ care ;
Rather would she from afar
Hold communion with a star ;
Or, to be still more in tune,
Worship tranquilly the moon.
Why, O why, then, is she there ?
Who ’s the maid Felicità ? ”

She is the daughter of an avaricious monster of a father, whose cru-